

Mental Health and Substance Use at Work

Employer Toolkit

Recovery Friendly



Treatment & Recovery for Opioid Use Disorder

TREATMENT

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are complex, with biological, psychological, and social causes and factors that can complicate treatment. However, SUD is a treatable medical condition, and the odds of recovery are remarkable – in fact, more than 10% of Americans live in recovery. Treatment may include medications, behavioral health counseling and other services to help patients reduce or stop alcohol and other drug use and address related physical or mental health problems. For most people, use of medications in combination with behavioral health treatment is most effective when recovering from an opioid use disorder (OUD).

Employers can dramatically increase accessibility by ensuring their health care plans cover all viable options – methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone, as well as behavioral therapy. In fact, employer-initiated treatment is more effective than treatment initiated by friends and family. Employees should have access to a full range of treatment via their health care plans. Medical professionals should tailor treatment plans to individuals' needs. Employees should not be required to use any one specific form of treatment.

MEDICATION ASSISTED TREATMENT

Medication assisted treatment (MAT) refers to drugs that help treat opioid use disorder (OUD, a substance-specific subset of SUD). MAT is effective at calming cravings, reducing opioid use and helping people stabilize and lead normal lives. Research shows that MAT significantly increases adherence to treatment and reduces opioid misuse compared with nondrug approaches. People who use MAT are more likely to make and maintain healthy social, psychological and lifestyle changes.

Accommodating employees who are being treated with MAT can sometimes be a challenge in the workplace. For example, methadone may cause impairment, posing a safety concern. There is insufficient data to determine whether buprenorphine impairs in a comparable way to methadone. Naltrexone has side effects that impact mental health, and there is increased overdose risk if a relapse occurs when compared to other forms of MAT. These challenges must be addressed, because MAT is the most effective way to treat opioid use disorder. Once employees stabilize on MAT, they can rebuild healthy, productive lives while contributing more to the workplace.

METHADONE	BUPRENORPHINE	NALTREXONE
Methadone is a synthetic opioid that replaces other opioids with milder effects. It diminishes the effects of physical dependence on opioids, withdrawal symptoms, and cravings. Methadone does not cause euphoria.	Buprenorphine (commonly known as Suboxone) is a semisynthetic opioid that diminishes the effects of physical dependence on opioids, withdrawal symptoms, and cravings. Buprenorphine works differently in the brain than methadone – after a certain dosage, it has a “ceiling effect” where the patient does not experience any other opioid effects, including euphoria.	Naltrexone (commonly known as Vivitrol) works differently than methadone and buprenorphine because it actively blocks opioids and their effects. If a person on naltrexone uses opioids, it blocks the euphoric and sedative effects of the opioid. However, there are several medical complications that may make naltrexone unsuitable for many people.

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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT

Behavioral health treatment is recommended in conjunction with all medication therapies for OUD. People receiving a combination of therapies have better outcomes than those who do not. While there are many types of behavioral health therapies, common goals are to:

- Modify underlying behaviors that may have led to OUD.
- Encourage patients to adhere to their prescribed medications.
- Treat other existing psychiatric or psychological disorders
- Participate in counseling as needed to rebuild relationships and build new support mechanisms.

RECOVERY

Recovery begins when a person regains control over their opioid or substance use disorder and begins to live a healthy, productive life. It is important to remember that:

- Recovery is a personal journey and is just as unique as individual substance use disorders. One person's recovery may differ dramatically from another's recovery.
- Relapse is natural a part of recovery. Recovering from an OUD or SUD may include making significant lifestyle changes that may be difficult to maintain.

One component of a successful recovery is gainful employment. Being employed offers the opportunity to make progress toward realization of goals, improved familial and social relationships, rebuilt financial stability, restoration of self-confidence, and a contribution to society among many other benefits.

Employers play an especially significant role in helping employees in recovery by embracing people with SUDs. Doing so prevents feelings of stigma and isolation, and greatly improves employee's chances of recovery. A supportive workplace environment can also help prevent relapse.

Employees who are in recovery have equal or lower health care costs, absenteeism and job turnover compared to employees who never report an SUD. Employers who help employee's complete treatment are likely to see a high return on investment when collaborating with employees throughout treatment to achieve recovery.

The Mental Health and Substance Use at Work Employer Toolkit has been developed to raise awareness with businesses about how to respond to the risks associated with mental health challenges and substance use disorder. The content is meant for educational purposes only and not for the purpose of providing legal advice or replacing the additional work needed to develop a responsible Recovery Friendly Workplace program. As such, it should not be used as a substitute for consultation with a legal professional, or other competent advisor.

Medical advice and information in this document were approved by The National Safety Council-NSC physicians who advise the Council on our substance use harm initiatives. These doctors are also members of the NSC Physician Speakers Bureau.

NEED HELP?

If you have questions or need help finding materials, or for local treatment providers, please contact admin@huroncountymhas.org.